

**Prepared Remarks for U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara Dinosaur Repatriation Ceremony
July 10, 2014**

Good afternoon. My name is Preet Bharara, and I am the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York.

Today, we are honored to repatriate to the people of Mongolia the fossilized remains of over 18 dinosaurs recovered by my Office in cooperation with the Department of Homeland Security. This is a historic event for the U.S. Attorney's Office, in addition to being a *pre-historic* event, and we are proud to participate in the return of these dinosaur skeletons to their rightful home.

Last year, at a ceremony much like this one, our Office returned a nearly complete and fully treated *Tyrannosaurus bataar* skeleton to the people of Mongolia. That was only the beginning. Today, we return a veritable nest of dinosaurs that includes two *Tyrannosaurus bataar* skeletons, along with numerous other examples of fossils of dinosaurs native to the Gobi Desert.

We're fortunate today to be surrounded by some of the fossils themselves that we are going to be returning to Mongolia. In the box on the ground furthest to my right, a piece called the "Graveyard of the Oviraptors," one piece of rock with four or five beasts from the Cretaceous period. They all met a common demise, not at the hands of smugglers, but at the hand of mother nature. They were originally thought to eat the eggs of other dinosaurs.

Speaking of eggs, here, on the table immediately next to me, we have an actual dinosaur egg. Should it hatch, in the way that the eggs in "Jurassic Park" did, just know that it wasn't in the program. But, sometimes, as the Jeff Goldblum character solemnly intoned in that movie, "Life finds a way." And as I mention Jurassic Park, we also have a piece on the table featuring two skeletons of *Gallimimus*, the dinosaurs that memorably stampeded in one scene in that movie.

We also have some pictures here of other dinosaur fossils that we are returning to Mongolia today along the walls here. The people of Mongolia can now restore them and display them as symbols of their status as a star within the paleontological firmament and astonishing symbols of Mongolian national pride.

So how did we get here? Well, first, there was a meteor. Fast forward 65 million years to just over two years ago, when our Office offered its assistance after the sale of a *Tyrannosaurus bataar* at auction was stopped by an attorney retained by the Government of Mongolia, Robert Painter. With the assistance of HSI, my office commenced an investigation that led to the filing of a civil action seeking the forfeiture of that *Tyrannosaurus* skeleton.

The investigation also led to the successful criminal prosecution of an individual, Eric Prokopi, who had imported a slew of illegally looted Mongolian dinosaur fossils. And it led to the discovery of other dinosaur remains, some of which were turned over voluntarily by a British business partner of Eric Prokopi, and which my office secured through the filing of a number of additional successful civil actions.

Among the fossils secured through this effort, depicted to my right and left, were two additional bataars, two *Saurolophus Angustirostris* skeletons, Oviraptor skeleton, a matrix of Oviraptors, an *Ankylosaurus* skeletons, an egg nest like the one you see here, a *Protoceratops* skeleton, and other dinosaur fossils of Mongolian origin.

Happily, we have a distinguished paleontologist with us, Mark Norell, who can tell us about these ancient and majestic creatures. But suffice to say, a recovery of this sort is without precedent. It is a haul sufficient enough to stock a natural history museum, which I understand actually is currently being built in Mongolia. We're honored to return these fossils to the Mongolian people.

This is a tremendous day for our Office, and I have many people to thank. First, I want to acknowledge the extraordinary perseverance displayed and assistance by the Government of Mongolia during the investigation. The Mongolian people never wavered in their dedication to protect their cultural heritage. I would also like to thank Robert Painter, for his assistance and role as liaison between our Office and the President of Mongolia.

I would also like to thank the numerous paleontologists who provided support with the forfeiture action, including:

- Mark Norell, the Chairman and Curator of the Division of Paleontology at the American Museum of Natural History
- Philip Currie, Professor and Canada Research Chair of Dinosaur Paleobiology at the University of Alberta
- Dr. Khishigiav Tsogtbataar
- Dr. Bolortsetseg Minjin

I also wish to thank the career prosecutors in my office who worked the civil and criminal forfeiture cases. Sharon Cohen Levin, Chief of the Money Laundering and Asset Forfeiture Unit, and AUSA Martin Bell handled the civil forfeiture action, with assistance from Lisa Mendola-D'Andrea of the same unit. Martin Bell, on behalf of what is now the Complex Frauds and Cybercrime Unit, handled the criminal investigation.

Finally, we have had a great partnership with HSI and its predecessor organization, ICE, over the past two decades, in which we have worked cooperatively to help locate, seize, and

repatriate stolen art, antiquities, and other property. This case, perhaps more than any, demonstrates the range of accomplishments that such a dynamic partnership can produce.